

**CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)**  
**OPENING STATEMENT FOR NASA HEARING**  
**February 16, 2006**

I want to welcome everyone here this morning for this important hearing on the future of NASA, the first of a number of hearings the Committee will hold related to NASA's proposed budget.

Let me start, in what has almost become a ritual at these hearings, by praising Administrator Griffin. In tough times and easy times, Mike Griffin has continued to be a steady model of competence and candor to which everyone in government should aspire. And he has recruited to the agency an impressive team, including the Deputy Administrator, an alumna of this Committee, who is appearing with him today. I want to thank him publicly, as the staff and I already have privately, for making the agency responsive and open to our inquiries, as demonstrated in this year's series of budget briefings for the Committee staff.

But to understand the budget is not necessarily to love it. The Administrator did an excellent job of balancing the agency's missions given the box he was put in, but it's our job to examine the box as well as its contents. And by "the box" I mean both the total funding for the agency and the missions that it's being mandated to perform.

I am extremely uneasy about this budget, and I am in a quandary at this point about what to do about it. This budget is bad for space science, worse for earth science, perhaps worse still for aeronautics. It basically cuts or deemphasizes every forward looking, truly futuristic program of the agency to fund operational and development programs to enable us to do what we are already doing or have done before.

Admittedly, that's a bit of a caricature, but I think we face some stark choices.

Now maybe that's all we can do, given our options. I support the Vision for Space Exploration, although I don't see any reason to accelerate it beyond the President's original plans. But given that NASA is not yet sure that it can accelerate it, it's not clear that we can save much money on the Crew Exploration Vehicle (CEV) and its launcher compared to the proposed budget.

As for the Space Shuttle and Space Station programs, we have a pretty clear decision to make. We can either have these programs or we can end them. There isn't any logical way I see to continue those programs for less money than NASA is proposing, and given the cost of shutdown, it's not clear how much money would even be saved through cancellation.

We can add more money to the total NASA budget. And I'd be willing to support that as long as any additional money went to the unmanned side of the program, and as long as the money didn't come from other science agencies. But money is not exactly "growing on trees" around here.

So what to do is not clear. Except for one concern, I'd even be willing to convince myself that this budget is just fine – a tough few years of transition to set the agency back on a sensible path in all its programs, which is, I think, how the Administrator legitimately thinks of it. But that one concern is a big one – we may never escape from the pattern we set this year.

If science becomes secondary, if scientists leave the agency, if new missions don't keep young researchers going, then it will be hard to leave this pattern. If the lunar programs, like all programs run by humans, can't live within the original cost projections, will money keep coming from science?

And let me point out that science isn't just good for scientists, and its rewards are not just psychic. Science programs, with their satellites and instruments, also push forward the technical frontiers. And earth science programs help us figure out what policy choices we should be making here on earth.

So the budget has just been out for a week, and I am still figuring out what to do. Again, I want to point out that given the requirements that Congress and others have imposed on him, the Administrator has come up with a thoughtful budget – probably the best that anyone could under the circumstances. But now the ball is in our court. I said when our authorization bill passed that if NASA didn't receive as much funding as we authorized, we'd all face some tough choices. Now we do.

Before I close, let me just update everyone for a minute on another NASA issue – one that shouldn't be as tough – and that's the question of scientific openness. Since the concerns of Dr. Hansen became known, the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator, Mr. Gordon and I have been working together to ensure that NASA is a model of scientific openness.

From the start, NASA has been responsive to our inquiries, and Mike Griffin began taking steps to rectify the problems. NASA still has a lot of work to do to ensure openness – that's Administrator Griffin's view as well as my own. But they have laid out a plan to do that work – starting with engaging in an open process to develop a clear policy on scientific communication. We will be working with NASA and following the development of the policy and its implementation closely. But I have high hopes that NASA will end up being a model of how agencies can guarantee scientific openness.

When Administrator Griffin last appeared before us, I said that he had brought forth a Renaissance at NASA. I want him to follow that up with an Enlightenment. We need free and open inquiry, and an agency that recognizes that the greatest exploration takes place inside the human mind.

And I look forward to continuing to work the Administrator and his team to make sure that Enlightenment occurs. Thank you.